

Rich Coffey Ranch
Colorado-Concho Rivers Confluence Area
Confluence of Colorado and Concho Rivers
Voss Vicinity
Cotton County
Texas

HABS No. TX-3354

HABS
TEX
48-CONCY,
7-

MEASURED DRAWINGS

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Building Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
RICH COFFEY HOUSE RANCH

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PART 1. INTRODUCTION

Location: Located .2 miles south of the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers, to east bank of Colorado River, 2.9 miles due west of Leaday townsite, Concho County, State of Texas

USGS Leaday Quadrangle, Universal Transverse Mercator
Coordinates: 14.431364.3492545

Present Owner: Bishop Powell; permanent easement granted to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, Big Spring, Texas

Present Occupant: abandoned; used for storage by tenants

Significance: The Rich Coffey house is architecturally significant as a building and stylistic type, the dogtrot type, unusual for this region. Climatic adaptation and site orientation are important; the house is oriented to the south to catch prevailing breezes. Craftsmanship is extraordinary, with excellent carpentry and superior stonework. The use of local materials is noteworthy; the stone was quarried on the site, and the lime mortar produced on the site. The complex is culturally significant as the residence of Concho County's first pioneering family; the Coffeys were the first permanent settlers at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers, and the house was constructed for the first of that family, Richard Coffey, who became an almost legendary figure in the history of West Texas. The structure is also important because of its association with Jonathan Cook, an outstanding Texas stonemason with several associated architectural works in the area. In addition, the house structure and outbuildings are in a remarkably unchanged state and as a complex present a viable image of a working cattle ranch in the last decades of the nineteenth century and the first years of the twentieth.

PART II. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1880-1881. Jonathan Cook, an Irish stonemason, was a resident at the Coffey ranch in 1880; a datestone ("1881") is located at the foot of the stairs.
2. Original and subsequent owners: The site is located on land which was patented in 1848 to the School Commissioners of Brazoria and Fort Bend Counties and sold by them to William H. Day, 9 April 1878.¹ Apparently Rich Coffey had never formalized his title to his land in the years prior to Day's acquisitions, for, on 3 May 1882, Coffey purchased, for \$500 from Day's estate, the 320 acres on which he (Coffey) had homesteaded some time in the late 1860s. Although the property is located in Concho County, it was formerly designated to be in Coleman County because of some confusion regarding the immediate proximity of the county line and the usual river division of the counties--the county line passes approximately 100 yards east of the house complex. Coffey himself thought his property to be in Coleman, and all transactions were registered in that county, where they remain. Therefore, reference is made to the Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Records.

1882	3 May 1882, G:339, Day Estate to Rich Coffey
1893	5 October 1893, 35:7, Rich Coffey & Mrs. Sallie Coffey to their son, W. A. Coffey, 120 acres "off the north end of 320 acres of said [Coffey homestead] survey..."
1915	6 May 1915, 90:497, Fogg Coffey to his brother W. A. Coffey; his [Fogg Coffey's] interest in the 320 acres
1923-1945	various exchanges of property interest among the children of W. A. Coffey, following his death in 1923; eventually, W. A. Coffey's son, J. B. Coffey, obtained chief interest
1981	17 April 1981, 527:47 Ida Ellen Coffey to Elizabeth Powell et al. of Coleman and Concho Counties, 370.7 acres "out of Brazoria County School Land Survey No. 226

3. Builder: The 1880 Census of Coleman County lists Rich Coffey and his family, a servant and a sixty-year-old boarder, Jonathan Cook, a native of Ireland, occupation "stone cutter."² No other information has come to light regarding stonemason Cook, but his supposed work at the Coffey house is of a very high quality, specific and idiosyncratic, which relates to several other contemporary stone houses in the neighborhood, notably the Ransbarger house in Runnels County and, to the east, the McLane-Hafner house on the Colorado River in Concho County, dated 1886 (HABS No. TX-3355). Also related in several ways is the curiously atypical first unit of the Ambrose Creswell house at Creswell's Bend in Coleman County, dated 1880 (HABS No. TX-3352).
4. Building materials: The stone for the house was quarried on the site. The lumber was hauled from Waco and Abilene.³
5. Original plans and construction: No original drawings have come to light; it is highly unlikely that any were ever produced for a vernacular structure of this sort. An early photograph documents the house in the early twentieth century with the same elements which exist today, the major exception being the enclosure of the original open dogrun.⁴
6. Alterations and additions: The enclosure of the dogtrot, a twentieth-century change, is nevertheless an old alteration. The long south porch may be original: its rafters are contiguous with the main house roof rafters, and it is placed in a situation normal for sheltering the stairs out of the dogtrot to the loft; the porch posts have been changed from the original chamfered ones. The porch is a very early element, as is the basic configuration of the southwest corner enclosure of the porch; the exterior walls of the corner porch enclosure have been cement-plastered in recent times. Standing-seam metal roofing covers old wood shingles. Essentially all original elements are in place, few alterations have been made, and no modern mechanical systems have been installed which might have weakened or drastically altered the simple sequence of spaces.

Various outbuildings and other elements such as a barn, cisterns, a windmill, and a storm cellar still exist and form a complete compound. An old family graveyard located approximately 220 feet southeast of the house existed until early 1989 when the graves were removed to the nearby Leaday Cemetery.

B. Historical Context:

For the general historical overview which places the property in the context of the development of cattle ranching at the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers please see HABS No. TX-3350.

The present-day Rich Coffey house, which replaced an earlier house in the immediate vicinity, was built in 1880-1881 for the Coffey family. The Coffeys were the first permanent settlers in the area of the confluence of the Concho and Colorado Rivers and one of the first permanent settling families in West Texas.

Rich Coffey was born in Georgia in 1823; he married Sarah (Sallie) Greathouse in 1849, and c1855 they came to Parker County, Texas.⁵ In 1860 he aided in the capture of Cynthia Ann Parker, a woman who as a child had been taken away in a Comanche raid on Fort Parker and raised as an Indian.⁶

In August 1862 Rich and Sallie Coffey and their family moved to the upper reaches of Elm Creek in Coleman County where he formed a settlement between the present-day towns of Leaday and Voss. The place was called Flat Top Settlement, a group of rough cabins, palisaded for defense against marauding Indians. Among the cowboys accompanying him were Bill and Nat Guest, Henry and Bob Meeks, and Jim and Bill Beddo.⁷

Toward the end of the 1860s, probably in 1869, Coffey relocated to the confluence of the two rivers, where he established another fortified settlement and continued to run cattle. This settlement, which became the permanent Coffey homestead, probably consisted of a number of fortified structures to shelter his own family and the men who worked for him as cowboys.⁸ Whatever had been constructed at that time no longer exists; it is possible that at least one of the first phase structures was replaced by the present stone house of 1880-1881.

Coffey's exploits during the Indian troubles of the 1860s and 1870s have become legendary in the region. He is also remembered as one of the initiators of the first cattle drives from this part of the state. As early as 1866, he had begun to make journeys to the salt lake on the Pecos River to sell watermelons in exchange for loads of salt, which he sold upon his return to the Concho-Coleman area. Coffey's sons related 21 trips to the salt lakes and that he made enough cash from these ventures to pay for his land.⁹ In 1875 he was appointed a member of the commission to choose the site of the Coleman County seat; in 1879 he began a post office on the Colorado River near his ranch, the post office named "Rich Coffey." In 1882 he regularized the ownership of his land by coming to an agreement with W. H. Day, the largest landowner at the time in the confluence

area. Coffey died 7 February 1897.¹⁰

Rich Coffey's children married the children of neighbors and settled nearby on land along the Colorado and Concho Rivers. His son W. A. (Bill) Coffey remained at the old homestead ranch until his death in 1923; Bill's younger brother Richard ("Fogg") Coffey married a neighbor, Ella Littlefield, and moved across the Colorado to the old Littlefield homestead and built a house for his family.¹¹ A daughter, Margaret, married James Beddo, and another married Nat Guest.¹² The original Coffey ranch has descended among the heirs of these offspring to the present owner, Bishop Powell, a great-grandson of Rich Coffey. Mr. Powell granted permanent easement to the Colorado River Municipal Water District.¹³ The house is currently used for storage by tenants.

In 1979 the Texas Water Commission granted permission to the Colorado River Municipal Water District, an entity based in Big Spring, to construct a large dam on the Colorado River. The site chosen was a location several miles downstream from Leaday, sixteen miles below the confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers. Early in the planning stages, a program was developed to address environmental concerns, including the impact of the proposed flood area on prehistoric and historic cultural resources. In 1980-1981 a survey of historic cultural resources was conducted by Freeman and Freeman under contract to Espey, Huston and Associates, a firm of Austin environmental consultants. Subsequently a number of other studies and amplifications of previous studies have been conducted. In early 1988 an Albuquerque, New Mexico, firm of environmental scientists, Mariah Associates, Inc., began further assessment of the area of the flood plan, including various archaeological investigations and assessments. Mariah has also acted in the role of coordinator of related projects, including this project: the recordation of nineteen endangered historic sites in the confluence area for the Historic American Buildings Survey and the Historic American Engineering Record. The sites were selected from a list compiled under the guidance of the Texas Historical Commission.

Construction was finished on the dam in the late summer of 1989. Called the Stacy Dam and Reservoir, the project will inundate approximately 19,200 acres, and the threat of inundation of the Rich Coffey house is possible in the near future.

PART III. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: Built on a high flat plain above the famous confluence of the Colorado and Concho Rivers, this late

nineteenth-century vernacular ranch house with its cluster of interesting old outbuildings presents a classic catalog of building types and building materials for this region, remarkably unchanged as there have been no modern intrusions (HABS photos TX-3354-1 and 2). It is an outstanding example of the secondary phase of development in the area: a substantial stone house, very carefully constructed, but absolutely devoid of any ornamentation or stylistic characteristics of its period. Originally constructed as an open dogtrot structure, this was one of the few examples in the entire region, being a type more common and more suitable to the milder climates in the eastern and southern parts of the state. It is truly a historic landmark on a particularly historic and beautiful site.

2. Condition of the fabric: The structure itself has been very little altered in the last one hundred years, nor has it been weakened by the introduction of modern mechanical systems. However, it has been neglected in recent times, left vacant, the windows partially boarded up. In some instances the voussoirs of the flat arches have slipped, but, otherwise, the masonrywork is sound. The general dilapidated appearance belies the fact of an exceptionally intact early building.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The one-and-one-half-story house is rectangular in form, the stone main structure approximately 48 feet in length and 17 feet wide, with a wooden porch approximately 10 feet wide across the entire south elevation (HABS photos TX-3354-A-1 to A-10).
2. Foundations: The limestone foundation above grade forms a stepped watertable at all exposed elevations, beginning in the course below the door sills. The spread of the watertable may be expressive of a wide footing.
3. Wall construction: Exterior walls are approximately 16 inches thick. The limestone masonrywork is of excellent craftsmanship. The exterior walls and the dogtrot faces of the separate unit walls extend some three feet above the floor of the half-story. The regular faced and squared stonework of the exterior walls and chimneys is set in a crude and friable mortar which has held up surprisingly well since the building's construction. Doors and windows have continuous sills and keyed flat arch heads. The regular thickness of the stone, six to eight inches, and the consistent length, fourteen to eighteen inches, is suggestive of a skilled hand. The placement of the flat arches above the openings is precise

in both stone cutting and in execution. The lime-sand mortar shows the presence of large pieces of lime, small rocks, and some organic matter. The quality of the lime is a case for the presence of a crude lime kiln somewhere near the building. The sand is probably from either the adjacent bluff or from the nearby river bed; the mortar seems to have been set in at least two phases: a setting bed on which to lay the stone, and a pointing joint; the joints are tooled or scored and the pointing mortar splays out over the joint opening.

The stone window lintels have mason's marks in a dotted or stippled pattern. Window and door lintels are treated in various ways. There are five finely-cut voussoirs over the east elevation windows and the same treatment for the larger window and door openings on the north elevation of the east unit. Oddly, the west unit's north elevation openings are treated with voussoirs over the door, and the window lintels are large stone rough-cut blocks, and the door and window sills are dressed with the mason's marks already mentioned. There is another variation at the west elevation: the northern window opening has a voussoired lintel treatment, and the southern window has a large rough lintel block. The masonry treatment for the openings on the south elevation (protected by the sheltering south porch) consists of voussoirs over all openings of the east unit and a large stone lintel over the door from the west room into the enclosed porch room. The inconsistencies in the treatment of the openings of the two units might possibly lend credence to a theory that the east unit is older, maybe dating from an 1870s-period construction on the site.

4. Structural systems, framing: Floor and ceiling joists span across the width of the house and are set into the stonework. Rafters sit on wood plates atop the stone walls and are tied just below where they butt at the ridge with a simple collar. The south porch rafters are separate members, but are contiguous with the main house roof rafters.
5. Porch and dogtrot: The long south porch is almost 11 feet wide. A portion of the porch (to the southwest and to the rear of the west stone unit) is enclosed and seems to be an old alteration in its basic configuration. The weatherboarding to the porch face is old; the exterior walls of this enclosure have been plastered on the south and west faces; the south window to this enclosure is one old fixed sash, 3-over-3; the west window is a full opening, fitted with 6-over-6 sashes. The porch floor is laid with some old flooring, but for the most part is patched with various materials: flooring, various pieces of wood siding, etc.

There is no ceiling to the porch, simply exposed rafters and purloins with old wood shingles visible above them. The dogtrot, 10 feet wide, has been enclosed, probably an old alteration as it is finished in beaded boarding and shiplap siding¹⁴: there is a door and frame set into the enclosure wall on the south (porch) face and a window set in on the north elevation. At the dogtrot, both north and south elevations, it seems that the half floor landing above the trot was always enclosed and skinned with neat weatherboarding with a little window opening framed to each face, now blocked.

6. Chimneys: There are two fireboxes in the house; they are of the same stone masonry as the house itself and are located to the east and west walls of the two separate stone units, each serving one of these rooms; there are no fireplaces in the half-story rooms above. The fireplaces are of the exterior type, with stone chimneystacks extending five courses above the roof ridge capped with a simple capping course.
7. Openings: Doorways, doors, and windows: The masonry treatment for the door and window openings is of particular interest and varies from wall face to wall face (see Wall construction, above). The north exterior doors and the south door off the porch into the enclosed dogrun are modern replacement doors of the five-stacked panels type. The door to the porch from the enclosed porch room and the door from the porch into the east room are old panelled doors of the typical late Victorian style of two long panels over two short panels. The remaining window sashes are old 6-over-6 sashes for the north and south elevations and 4-over-4 for the east and west windows to either side of the fireplaces.
8. Roof:
 - a. Shape covering: The roof is a simple gabled roof with a long shed roof extending to cover the wide south porch; this shed roof is continuous and at the same pitch as the north slope. A recent standing-seam metal roofing covers old wood shingles still in place under the metal.
 - b. Cornice: There is a strong simple treatment composed of a 1-by-12-inch wood member acting as a type of frieze, topped by a typical boxed cornice.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: There are two almost square stone-walled rooms arranged symmetrically to either side of the dogtrot. A wide porch to the south extends the full length of the building; a portion of the southwest corner of this porch is enclosed, probably as a cooking room.
 - b. Second floor: On the second, or loft, floor the central space is enclosed as a proper stairs passage with two low rooms to either side, corresponding to the rooms below.
2. Stairway: The stairs to the upper level rise from the south porch against the west wall of the dogtrot and extend about three feet into the body of the porch itself, strong evidence that the porch in its present configuration is an original element. Since the stairs were boxed in when the trot was enclosed, no evidence remains of railing or baluster types.
3. Flooring: Flooring in the main house, both floors, seems to be original 1-by-4-inch tongue-and-groove laid over 2-by-8-inch joists, 2 feet on center. Some old 1-inch-by-6-inch porch flooring remains in place, but for the most part the present flooring consists of various materials laid down in recent years to patch it.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The walls of the two main rooms and the walls of the rooms above them in the half story were left naked stone, very rough. The downstairs east room received a modern cement plaster in recent times. This room, and the room directly above it, seem to be the only rooms in the house to have received any sort of finish; they are ceiled with beaded-boardings. (The interior stone walls were left rough, that is, unplastered, in the original building phase at two other contemporary houses in the vicinity, the Creswell-Rozzle house and the McLane-Hafner house.) All other rooms in the main house have exposed ceiling joists.
5. Decorative features: There are no decorative features in this simple vernacular house. The very interesting mantelpieces for the downstairs main rooms, the only rooms in the house with fireplaces, are original, very rough straightforward constructions with no moldings or decorations of any sort.
6. Heating: There are two fireplaces only, one in each of the first floor main rooms.

D. Site:

1. General setting: The house faces south toward the river. It is situated on the edge of a long flat plateau; a slow slope begins south of the house and continues past the site of the former family graveyard to the southeast. The present-day approach to the house is from the north through the farmyard.
2. Outbuildings: At the southwest corner of the building is a roughly-constructed stone cistern, fed by guttering off the south porch; the cistern is approximately 7 feet in diameter, its walls raised above ground to about 3 feet. West of the house about 17 feet is a stone-and-cement-plaster storm cellar of relatively recent date; its dimensions are approximately 8 feet wide by 15 feet (HABS photos TX-3354-B-1 and B-2). North of the house, approximately 30 feet from the northeast corner of the house, is a windmill which fed water into a large stone-and-cement-plaster cistern approximately 17 feet in diameter, its wall rising approximately 7 feet above grade. Adjacent is a low stone watering trough, approximately 7 feet wide and 16 feet long. Approximately 225 feet to the north of the house, and on axis with the house, is a remaining old barn, possibly of late nineteenth-century date; it is approximately 30 feet square, of old frame construction, with vertical board siding, patched with corrugated metal and a corrugated metal roof (HABS photo TX-3354-C-1). To the northeast of the house and aligned with the barn are the roofless remains of a stone chicken house and stone-walled chicken yard (HABS photo TX-3354-D-1), probably dating from the 1950s, the date of construction of an almost identical stone chicken house and yard on the McLane-Hafner Ranch (HABS No. TX-3355).
3. Landscaping, enclosures: Only fragments of old fencing remain in the barnyard and in the immediate house vicinity. There are numerous scattered remains of stone walks and old step footings around the house itself.

Prepared by:
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August 1989

PART IV. ENDNOTES

1. Reference is to Coleman County Courthouse, Deed Record vol. B, 572 and 573.
2. Hazie Davis LeFevre, Concho County History 1858-1958 (Eden, Texas, March 1959), 37. Both the 1870 and 1880 Census rolls of Coleman County are published here; Coffey and his family are listed in both.
3. Martha Doty Freeman and Joe C. Freeman, A Cultural Resource Inventory of the Proposed Stacy Reservoir; Concho, Coleman and Runnels Counties, Texas, vol. II: Historical Cultural Resources, report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Espey, Huston and Associates, Inc., Engineering and Environmental Consultants (Austin, Texas, March 1981), 3-8. Freeman is quoting from an article in The Eden Echo, 13 September 1979, 13.
4. Ibid., 9-27.
5. Leona Bruce and Ralph Terry, "Richard Coffey Family," published in Coleman County Historical Commission, A History of Coleman County and Its People, (San Angelo, Texas: Anchor Publishing Company, 1985), vol. I. 518 and 519.
6. Walter Prescott Webb and H. Bailey Carroll, eds., The Handbook of Texas (Austin, Texas: Texas State Historical Association, 1952), 378.
7. Bruce, 518.
8. Ibid., 518.
9. Freeman, 3-7 and 3-8.
10. Bruce, 518.
11. Donald R. Abbe and Joseph E. King, "A Preliminary Report: Historical Resources within the Stacy Dam Project Area," draft of a report prepared for the Colorado River Municipal Water District by Mariah Associates, Inc., Environmental Consultants (Lubbock, Texas, June 1989), 57 and 58.
12. Bruce, 519.
13. The exact date permanent easement was granted is not clear as the Coffey Ranch easement documents had not been filed either at Coleman or Paint Rock as late as August 1989.
14. A published (Freeman and Freeman, Figure 9-7b) early twentieth century photograph showing the open dogtrot also indicates the enclosure occurred during the present century. A photocopy of this photograph is attached.

PART V. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was sponsored by Mariah Associates, Inc., archaeologists; recorded under the supervision of Greg Kendrick, HABS regional coordinator, Denver. The project was completed during the summer of 1989 at the project field office at Houston and College Station, Texas. Project supervisor was Graham B. Luhn, A.I.A., architect; project architectural historian was Gus Hamblett, Texas A&M University; intern architects were Debbie Fernandez and Paul Neidinger; student architects were Brian Dougan, Robert Holton, Janna Johnson, Wayne Jones, and Pat Sparks, Texas A&M University; project photographer was Paul Neidinger, photographic processing by Laura McFarlane.



Figure 9-7



Figure 9-7